

Winfield Scott to Andrew Jackson, January 2, 1818, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT TO JACKSON.

New York, January 2, 1818.

Sir, Your letter of the 3d Ult. was handed to me about the 22d and has not been read—I might almost say thought of, since. These circumstances will show that it is my wish to reply to you dispassionately.

I regret that I cannot accept the challenge that you offer me. Perhaps, I may be restrained from wishing to level a pistol at the breast of a fellow being, in private combat, by a sense of religion; but lest this motive should excite the ridicule of gentlemen of *liberal* habits of thinking and acting, I beg leave, to add, that I decline the honor of *your* invitation from *patriotic scruples*. My ambition is not that of Erastostratus.¹ I should think it would be easy for you to console yourself under this refusal, by the application of a few epithets, as coward, etc, to the object of your resentment, and, I here promise to leave you, until the next war to persuade yourself of their truth.

¹ Or Herostratus; "The aspiring youth that fired the Ephesian dome".

Your famous order bears date the 22d April, 1817. At intervals of three and four months thereafter—that is, when it had been officially published to the troops of your Division, and printed in almost every paper in the union, as if to chalenge discussion, I found myself in company where it was the subject of conversation. Not being under your command, I was as free to give my opinion on this *public act* as any body else; for, I presume, you will not assert, that where an officer is not expressly restrained by the military code, he has

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not all the rights of any other citizen. For this fair expression of opinion, on a principle as universal as the profession of Arms, and which opinion I, afterwards, at your instance, state to you in all its detail, you are pleased to charge me with having slandered you behind your *back!*—an accusation which I consider the more amusing as I never had the honor of being in your *presence* in all my life. I can assure you, sir, that nothing but my great respect for your superior age and services, prevents me from indulging, also, in a little bitter pleasantry on this point.

It seems that you are under the further impression, that if you had been brought to trial for publishing that order (an idea that I never heard any other suggest) and / appointed one of your judges, that, assassin-like, I should have approached the holy sanctuary of justice, etc. Such is, I think, your language. Now, like you, without believing one word of it, it would be as easy for me, manually, to retort all this abuse, as it was for you to originate it; but I must inform you, that however much I may desire to emulate certain portions of your history, I am not at all inclined to follow the pernicious example that your letter furnishes.

You complain of harshness on my part. My letter to which yours is a reply, is, doubtlessly, somewhat bold in its character; but believing that in an affair with you, it was only necessary to have *right* on one's side, in order to obtain *approbation* , I had no other care in its composition, than to avoid every thing personally offensive, as far as the truth and a fair discussion of the subject would permit; and I still rest persuaded that the *fact* corresponds with my intention. It is true, that I spoke of you, and treated you, as a *man* without the petty qualifications of common usage; because, in addressing *you* , I then considered them as so many diminutives; but I now begin to apprehend that universal success and applause have somewhat spoiled you, and, that I shall, ultimately, be obliged to fall into the common-place habit observed in respect to common-place people, and consider you as nothing more than a *gentleman* .

Permit me to request—I think I have a right to demand, a sight of the *original* anonymous letter which has given rise to this discussion. If I mistake not, your correspondent is a

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greater personage than you, perhaps, imagine—nay so high, that he has once essayed “to sit himself above the highest” in our american sphere. The letter shall be returned as soon as the *hand* is compared with that of a certain agent of the personage alluded to.

I cannot close this letter without expressing a belief, that on the return of your wonted magnanimity, I shall be requested to burn the one which has elicited it, by way of apology for the injury it does me. Accordingly it has been seen, as yet, by but one individual (of my staff) and shall be held in reserve, until a certain time has elapsed, attending that just expectation. In the mean time, I shall have the honor to remain, sir,

Very Respy.,

I certify that the foregoing is a correct copy from the original which I received from the post office myself in the absence of General Jackson.

J. M. Glassell A. D. Camp